

# Ramp It Up!

*Access – the key to public recreation*

There's plenty of access to the living room couch, perhaps just a little too much. But to get us off that couch and into the outdoors, speakers at the 20-Mile Bend Boat Ramp Dedication at the northern tip of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in central Palm Beach County agreed that access to public recreational areas is key in making that happen.

## CREDITS

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*The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.*

*Our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply.*

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And it was access that was celebrated at the Sept. 30 boat-ramp ceremony. Recreational fishermen and boaters can now take a little time away from the hustle-bustle of city life, traffic and noise and enjoy a quiet day of fishing in the northern reaches of the Everglades.

"This boat ramp project was a labor of love," said Pamela Mac'Kie, South Florida Water Management District assistant deputy executive director of land resources. "But it wasn't without its challenges," she said, "including four hurricanes and a major effort to ensure the entry road was stable and safe."

October's Hurricane Wilma also took a blow at the boat ramp less than a month after opening, but with only minor damage that has since been repaired.

A former boat ramp at the S-5A pump station was closed in 1997 to make way for construction of stormwater treatment areas. However, at the urging of the public for more boat ramps, this new and better



The first boat from the new 20-Mile Bend Boat Ramp is launched while project partners and media representatives look on during the dedication ceremony.

facility will mean that boaters don't have to travel all the way to the refuge's main entrance, west of Boynton Beach, to launch.

Mac'Kie praised all those involved in the partnership for seeing the project through to completion. The expanded facility includes an adjacent fishing dock, covered kiosk and environmentally-friendly composting restrooms. A ribbon-cutting officially opened the ramp to boating.

Directions from West Palm Beach: Follow Southern Boulevard/SR80 west to CR880. Make a left onto CR880 and cross the iron bridge. Turn left immediately onto 20-Mile Bend Boat Ramp Road. Travel east to entrance gate on south side of road (approximately 1 mile).

There is a paved parking lot and ramp that can accommodate two boats at once.

Admission is \$5 per vehicle, and the facility is open daily from sunrise to sunset.

The boat ramp is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. For additional information, call (561) 735-6030.



## Bold and Aggressive Plan from page 2

at its peak. The 730-square-mile lake rose by more than 5.5 feet in less than three months – from just over 12 feet in early August to more than 18 feet by mid-October 2004. The high winds, heavy rainfall and an unseasonably warm summer contributed to murky waters, poor water quality and a decline in the health of the lake that continue to persist this year. In addition, regulated freshwater discharges needed to lower lake levels and prevent flooding have impacted the health of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries downstream. The ecosystem took another blow in late October 2005: Hurricane Wilma. Impacts to the lake and estuaries from the storm are still being assessed. (See Hurricane Wilma story on page 2.)

"Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee River, the St. Lucie River and our coastal estuaries are suffering," said Carol Ann Wehle, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District. "Improving ecological conditions will take the strong commitment of communities, individuals and all levels of government to ensure this interconnected system is restored and remains healthy in the future."

The Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery plan is a joint effort toward a common goal. Partners include the South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Community Affairs and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. With a funding commitment by the state to expedite the \$200 million LOER Fast-Track projects, Gov. Bush will ask the Florida Legislature to provide a second installment of \$25 million in next year's budget, building on an initial investment of \$30 million this year – \$25 million in growth management funding from the Department of Environmental Protection and \$5 million from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

*For a copy of the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery plan, including detailed descriptions of each component, visit [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov) and click on the LOER icon.*



Question selected from District letters and emails received from the public.

**Q.** I've heard about the Acceler8 above-ground reservoirs that will be built to hold excess water and help with ecosystem restoration goals. Are these like above-ground swimming pools? How is the water going to be contained, and what will prevent it from leaking out?

**A.** The reservoirs are much like above-ground swimming pools but a lot bigger. An above-ground pool usually has plastic or metal sides and bottom to keep the water in. Similarly, an in-ground swimming pool usually has cement walls and bottom to keep the water from leaking back into the ground. Our reservoirs will have dirt walls, or embankments, with a layer of soil-cement (much like that used for in-ground swimming pools) on the inside that helps to prevent water from seeping through.

However, the primary method to minimize seepage is by placing a geomembrane within the dirt of the embankment. This is like a thick sheet of plastic or vinyl much like a vinyl liner in a swimming pool. This geomembrane is laid flat within the embankment with a layer of dirt on each side.

Another way to reduce seepage is to place a very porous material such as sand in a vertical column in the center of the embankment. The sand catches the water that is trying to leak through the dirt. Since sand is very porous as compared to dirt, the water follows the sand to the bottom where it is collected in a pipe. It is important to prevent water from leaking through the reservoir walls to keep the walls strong. Unlike swimming pools, reservoirs do not mind if some water leaks out the bottom. The water that leaks out helps replenish groundwater which for many places in South Florida is the source of drinking and irrigation water. Also, the ground is a natural filter and as the water leaks through the ground, it is naturally cleansed.

To make sure reservoirs don't cause flooding, they are designed so they don't leak too much water back into the ground too fast. This is done by placing a canal all around the reservoir to catch excess water that leaks from the bottom.

## ANSWER TO FIND FREDDY

Okee-Tantie Campground and Marina, Lake Okeechobee

Freddy is visiting the Okee-Tantie Campground and Marina – located on Lake Okeechobee at the mouth of the Kissimmee River, just minutes away from the spot where Gov. Jeb Bush unveiled the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery plan (see cover story). Okee-Tantie is home to some of the largest bass fishing tournaments in the United States and is very important to the economy of this region. The fish don't just bring fishermen to this area, either! Bird-watching enthusiasts come to Okee-Tantie from all over the world to visit the nearby Audubon Sanctuary on Lake Okeechobee.

The 110-mile-long Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail and the Herbert Hoover Dike that both surround the lake are included in the national park system. The Florida National Scenic Trail also passes through Okee-Tantie as it winds its way all the way to the state line and eventually as far north as Canada.



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